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# Unit 1: The challenge of transporting children with special needs

## Overview

The opening session of the course is a brief introduction to the “big picture” of how special education and related services have evolved in our society over the past twenty-five years - and of the pivotal role school buses have played in extending access to educational services for children with special needs.

The unit explores new challenges facing schools and bus drivers serving children with disabilities today.

Unit 1 also provides drivers with an overview of the course.

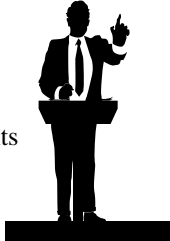


## Unit 1 Framework

<b>Core Content Outline</b>  1.1. Unit 1 introduction 1.2. How far we've come 1.3. The pivotal role of the school bus 1.4. New challenges facing schools and drivers of special education students 1.5. Course overview 1.6. Unit 1 review	<b>Objectives</b>  By the conclusion of this unit, drivers will be able to:  1. Describe ways our society has made progress in educating children with special needs. 2. Explain the pivotal role of the school bus in providing access to education for children with disabilities 3. Identify new challenges facing schools in educating children with special needs. 4. Explain course guidelines. 5. Describe course goals.
<b>Suggested Time</b>  30 minutes	<b>Preparation</b>  1. Driver Workbooks prepared to distribute to class 2. Course schedule confirmed 3. Facility logistics checked

## BEST PRACTICE BACKGROUND

**First impressions are important.** In any type of classroom, students often assess the instructor from the moment he or she walks into the room. Pre-planning of every instructional and logistical detail is the hallmark of a professional trainer, and students of any age can usually “read” an instructor’s degree of preparation from “Minute One” of class.



**Setting the tone.** An introduction gives trainers a chance to set the right tone for the subsequent instruction. Sometimes the non-verbal messages a trainer gives off at the beginning of a course have greater impact than the verbal messages. For instance, if a trainer acts bored, like they “really don’t want to be there,” drivers will pick up the negativity in a heartbeat. On the other hand, if a trainer is knowledgeable and interested about the topic to be addressed, drivers will usually be more enthusiastic too.

Although experienced trainers inevitably develop their own “style” of opening a class, there are typically several key messages to communicate at the onset of a course, including:

- **Trainer introductions.** Not just “who I am,” but “why this topic is important to me” and “what my credentials are for teaching this course.”
- **Logistical concerns.** Location and use of fire exits; location of rest rooms;

smoking, emergency phone number; parking and cell phone policies; medical emergency protocols; etc. should all be explained at or near the beginning of class.

- **Instructional materials.** Trainers should distribute Driver Workbooks to each driver in the class, briefly explaining how they’re laid out and how they’ll be utilized. Drivers should bring something to write with.

**“Clear the deck.”** During an opening, a good trainer gives his or her class a chance to express any questions or concerns before moving on to the course contents *per se*.

### UNIT 1.1 CORE CONTENT

## Unit 1 Introduction

If a trainer “plunges ahead” out of nervousness or rigid adherence to the clock before all class concerns have been addressed, they usually reemerge later anyway and can become an unnecessary distraction.

Some drivers need encouragement to verbalize questions. Remind them that the only ‘stupid’ question is the one you don’t ask.

## Instructional Strategies

### Discussion questions

- ✓ *Do you have any questions or concerns about this class before we move on?*

### Overhead transparencies

- ✓ *Overhead 1.1: “Welcome to the Special Drivers for Special Children Course”*

### Flipchart

- ✓ *List participant questions which may come up later in class; check flipchart periodically as class progresses*

### Workbook

- ✍ *Distribute Driver Workbooks and ask drivers to write their name on them.*

## BEST PRACTICE BACKGROUND

Serving children with special needs is a moral and legal imperative for public schools today, but things have changed so much that it's easy to forget how far our society has come. Twenty-five years ago, children born with what were then called "handicaps" rarely had the opportunity to interact with their peers, let alone get an education. Children with serious disabilities often spent their childhoods at home or in institutions. There was little need for driver training in special needs procedures because few children with special needs went to school.

The challenge of safely transporting toddlers and preschoolers with disabilities on a school bus didn't keep anyone up at night because few Americans considered it a school's or a community's responsibility. There were no bus drivers asking for help about how to transport medically fragile children on buses. If children had serious medical problems, they spent their school days in a hospital, at home, or in an institution. No one dreamed that such children would be able to go to school.

Children with serious physical, medical, or emotional problems didn't provide challenges on school buses in 1975 as they do today. For the most part, these children didn't ride buses and were not served by their public schools.

**Amazing changes.** The advancements in educational opportunities for children with special needs over the past generation have truly been amazing. There has been a profound change in how our

society treats children with disabilities.

The roots of these changes go back a long way. The Fourteenth Amendment to the United States

Constitution provides that no state may "deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws." Equal protection under the law is the heart of our country's democracy. Over many decades, this fundamental democratic belief has been used to extend citizenship and greater opportunity to groups of people long excluded from the mainstream of American life.

Of all the excluded groups, few suffered more discrimination, more stereotyping, more privations and indignities than the disabled.

Unfortunately, many Americans

### UNIT 1.2 CORE CONTENT

#### *How far we've come*

aren't aware of how hard people with disabilities have had to fight for greater opportunity.

Although many local struggles for "handicapped rights," as they were then called, took place earlier, it wasn't until 1973 that the rights of the disabled were articulated in federal law. Today children with disabilities are integrated into the educational system. This came about because of the efforts of thousands of parents of children with disabilities, disabled individuals, advocates and organizations.

## Instructional Strategies

### Discussion questions

- ✓ *How were disabled ("handicapped") children treated when you were young? How about during your parents' generation?*
- ✓ *What are the American roots of the special education revolution?*

### Overhead transparencies

- ✓ *Overhead 1.2: "How Far We've Come"*

### Workbook

- ✎ 1.2

## BEST PRACTICE BACKGROUND

The advances in how our society treats children with special needs could not have occurred without school buses and bus drivers. Getting children with disabilities to school was one of the major barriers to providing them an education. It is no exaggeration to say that special education is unthinkable without the school bus.



### Remembering the pioneers.

When children with disabilities were first placed on bus routes in the 1960's and 1970's, bus drivers suddenly faced many new questions. With little guidance or training, the first "special ed" bus drivers did a great job at getting children with disabilities to and from school.

Often forced to work with little guidance, these early "special ed" drivers are a testimony to the uniquely caring nature of transportation people and to their determination to solve unforeseen problems in the interest of children. Back in the "old days" equipment to load and transport children in wheelchairs was primitive at best – drivers often carried both children and wheelchairs on and off the bus, and "wheelchair securement" sometimes consisted of jury-rigged contraptions devised by the local mechanic, or even tying wheelchairs in with rope!

Little information about the special needs of children was ever shared with drivers.

The school bus is absolutely essential to special education today. The continuing growth in the numbers of special needs children attending most school districts and the increasing diversity and severity of the types of special needs being served make the school bus (and driver) one of the most important parts of special education.

The job of a bus driver or aide handling children with special needs will never be simple. In spite of advances in special needs safety, school bus drivers will always encounter situations for which there are few if any guidelines. Children with totally unique problems and conditions

## UNIT 1.3 CORE CONTENT

### *The pivotal role of the school bus*

will always pose a challenge.

In one way, not that much has changed from thirty years ago: the most important element in providing these children access to education will still be a bus driver's diligence, caring...and love.

**A proud tradition.** Without school buses, the advances in educational opportunity for children with disabilities over the past generation would not have happened. Bus drivers today who are just beginning to serve children with special needs are entering a proud tradition.

## Instructional Strategies

### Discussion questions

- ✓ *Why have school buses been so important to educating children with disabilities?*
- ✓ *How has special education busing changed over the years?*

### Overhead transparencies

- ✓ *Overhead 1.3: "The Pivotal Role of the School Bus"*

### Workbook


- ✎ 1.3

### Optional activity

- ✓ *See Activity 1.3: "Veteran Driver Panel: the Early Days"*

## BEST PRACTICE BACKGROUND

Several factors create increasing challenges for schools and bus drivers serving children with special needs:

1. **Growing numbers.** In many areas, increasing numbers of children with disabilities have been identified or newly enrolled in recent years. 
2. **Increasing diversity.** As medical and special education professionals identify new syndromes and problems affecting children, schools today may find themselves serving new categories of special needs they've never dealt with before.
3. **Increasing severity.** As medical technology has improved and early intervention has become more effective, children with increasingly severe physical disabilities survive to school age. Another factor is children born to drug- or alcohol-addicted parents. In 1999, the Supreme Court definitively extended the scope of schools' responsibilities to serve medically fragile children. At the same time, the population of children with extremely severe behavioral problems has grown in many school systems in recent years.
4. **Increasing number of schools and programs served.** As schools try to meet the above challenges, transporters are often asked to service an increasing number of schools and

special programs, further complicating transportation arrangements.

5. **New technology.** Equipment for transporting children with special needs is constantly evolving – for instance, both wheelchair securement systems and wheelchairs themselves have changed drastically in recent years. Drivers and monitors must be provided with constantly updated information.
6. **Inclusion.** Increasingly, parents and special education advocates demand full inclusion of special needs children in “regular” school programs – including on regular buses. The separate “special ed bus” is seen as a form of

## UNIT 1.4 CORE CONTENT *New challenges*

segregation. While mixing typical children with children with special needs undoubtedly benefits all children, it also creates new challenges for school personnel – especially transportation. The days when there was a clear line between “special ed drivers” and “regular drivers” may be limited. Children with special needs are routinely mainstreamed onto regular buses. In many ways every bus driver is becoming a “special ed driver” today.

### Instructional Strategies

#### Discussion questions

- ✓ *What impact does full inclusion have on pupil transportation?*

#### Overhead transparencies

- ✓ *Overhead 1.4: “New Challenges”*

#### Workbook

- ✎ 1.4

#### Optional activity

- ✓ *See Activity 1.4: “Special Education Guest Speaker: New Challenges”*

## BEST PRACTICE BACKGROUND

Trainers should take enough time to make sure drivers are clear about every aspect of the class.

**Course Goals.** The course has 4 overall goals:

1. **Awareness.** A greater awareness of the challenges facing children with disabilities is a key goal.
2. **Current information.** Special needs transportation is constantly evolving, and both new and experienced school bus drivers need to learn current safety procedures. Providing up-to-date information is an important goal of the course.
3. **Confidence.** Driving children with special needs is a big responsibility. Drivers can feel intimidated by the topics covered in this course. A key goal is providing drivers with the resources, skills, and awareness to confidently meet the challenges they'll face.
4. **Asking for help.** No matter how comprehensive the curriculum and how knowledgeable the trainer, no course can teach everything about special needs transportation safety. An important goal of the course is convincing drivers of the importance of asking for help when facing an unfamiliar situation.

**Course Guidelines.** Trainers should explain expectations for driver conduct during class time.

- **Attention and courtesy.** Trainers should not tolerate "side conversations" during class. Instead, drivers should be encouraged to

share their thoughts with everyone.

- **Active participation.** The course depends on active participation of drivers. Drivers should be frequently encouraged to ask questions, share experiences, contribute suggestions, etc.
- **Attendance and timeliness.** Trainers should explain attendance requirements and strongly encourage drivers to attend all sessions. Inform drivers they'll be required to sign in. Late arrivals are distracting and should be discouraged.
- **Emergencies.** Procedures for when a genuine emergency arises and drivers must miss class should be clearly explained.
- **Review questions.** The curriculum includes review

## UNIT 1.5 CORE CONTENT *Course overview*

questions. Trainers can reassure drivers they'll do fine on reviews if they pay attention and actively participate in discussions.

- **Evaluations.** Ask drivers to keep evaluation notes during class so they can fill out the evaluation form accurately at the end. Encourage drivers to be honest when they evaluate the course, and assure them their comments will be confidential.

**Course Agenda.** Drivers should have a solid understanding of what the course will cover. Questions about the schedule should be cleared up early.

## Instructional Strategies

### Discussion questions

- ✓ *What do you hope to accomplish by taking this course?*
- ✓ *What specific special education topics do you most want to learn about in this course?*

### Overhead transparencies

- ✓ *Overhead 1.5a: "Course Goals"*
- ✓ *Overhead 1.5b: "Course Guidelines"*
- ✓ *Overhead 1.5c: "Course Agenda"*

### Workbook

- ✍ *Refer drivers to the "Course Goals," "Course Guidelines," and "Course Agenda" sections in the Driver Workbook (pp. 3-5, 8)*

## BEST PRACTICE BACKGROUND

An organized review of the unit clarifies any confusion and helps drivers retain key points.

**“Tell them what you told them.”** Briefly summarize again the points made and issues addressed during previous discussion of the unit’s 4 main topics:

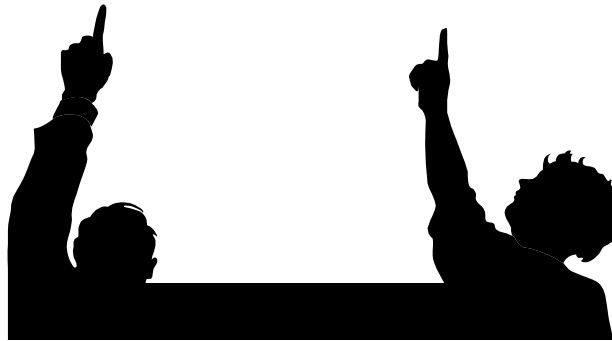
1. How far we’ve come in educating children with disabilities;
2. The pivotal role of the school bus in the special education revolution;
3. New challenges facing schools and drivers in special education; and
4. Course overview, including goals, guidelines, and agenda.

Use the summary review as an opportunity to clarify any confusion drivers have about the topics. Strongly encourage drivers to ask questions.

**Assessment.** Return to the unit’s objectives to assess how well drivers comprehended the topics covered.

**Review questions.** Use the Review Questions in the Driver Workbook as a group oral quiz, as “homework,” or as a more formal review prior to the start of the Unit 2.

## UNIT 1.6 CORE CONTENT *Unit 1 review*



### Instructional Strategies

#### Review questions

- ✓ *How has our society progressed in terms of educating children with disabilities?*
- ✓ *How important has the school bus been in extending educational opportunities to children with special needs?*
- ✓ *What new challenges face schools and bus drivers in terms of providing children with disabilities an education?*
- ✓ *What do the main goals of this course mean to you?*

#### Overhead transparencies

- ✓ *Overhead 1.6: “Review”*

#### Workbook

- ✍ 1.6